

It's Our Studio: The Nature of Mentorship at New Urban Arts

Elena Belle White

November 2008

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Introduction

The space is open, light-filled and colorful. Music with a heavy beat is pulsing softly in the corner. Youth and staff enter the space, say their hellos, some give hugs. There are no doors or closed cabinets in the space – materials are open and accessible to all. Art-work covers the walls and hangs from the ceiling. Tables are pushed together and become piled high with art-making supplies. Chairs are pulled up. Now everyone is crowded around, engaged and working. The hum of collective work is evident and infectious. Two young women walk in, clinging to each other; they are welcomed with smiles and hellos; they find seats and add themselves to the mix. The youth here at New Urban Arts are in high school; most of the artist mentors are young adult emerging artists in college, graduate school or beyond, but it's hard to tell the difference. Everyone sits at the tables together; no one seems to be in charge.

The relationship between young people and adults in our society is a complex one. Mutual distrust often abounds; “ordinary adults often seem frightened by adolescents, fearing both their power and their vulnerability” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p.342). At the core of countless community-based youth arts organizations, however, is a commitment to empowering youth as learners, valuing youth participation and input, and honoring their artistic process (Soep & Chavez, 2005; Heath & Roach, 1999). Most in the field recognize that building strong meaningful youth/adult relationships is a key component of youth development. These critical relationships must be examined closely and understood more deeply so that we, as youth workers, can more effectively serve the youth with whom we work.

In this research I explore the nature of mentorship at one such community-based youth arts organization. Founded in 1997 by a group of college and high school students in Providence RI, New Urban Arts (NUA) has a deep tradition of collaboration between youth and adults. NUA offers free arts programming to local high-school-aged youth; at the core of this programming is a unique mentor/mentee relationship, a relationship also at the core of my research.

Through this investigation I ask: what mentorship model is employed at New Urban Arts to engage and empower youth? How does this mentorship serve to nurture the learner, the citizen and the artist within each of the young people at NUA? I first explore the learning environment at NUA, specifically examining the roles played by both youth and mentor. Next I examine the elements of the NUA community which foster a democratic space; I study the role of community-connected art-making as well as internal youth leadership. Lastly I observe how artist mentors help to make art an accessible tool for youth as they create meaning and develop their identities. I conclude that the collaborative, youth-focused, familial NUA mentor model has powerful implications for the field of community-based youth arts and beyond.

Traditionally, there has been little distinction made between “teaching” and “mentoring.” In conventional learning environments, the teacher’s role is that of the authority, one who gives information and directs learning, while the student is the recipient, one who absorbs and follows. Many community-based youth arts organizations, however, have shifted away from this “adult as authority” paradigm toward a more symmetrical, collaborative, youth-focused model (Baca, 2005; Soep & Chavez, 2005).

Through this investigation I examine the nature of youth-adult relationships at NUA, which are framed as “mentorships.”

For the purposes of this research, my working definition of “mentorship” is a youth/adult relationship in which both parties contribute valid perspectives, skills, and interests, which in turn inform the relationship and the creative work at hand. In her research regarding youth-adult partnerships, Camino (2000) recognizes “an emerging consensus that (a) building healthy communities that also promote youth development necessarily requires youth as key actors and (b) youth-adult partnerships are a key strategy for success” (p. 11). In communities such as NUA, “mentorship” has become synonymous with this relational redistribution of power. The NUA website describes the mentoring relationship as one that “foster[s] risk taking and self-discovery through community building and creative arts projects designed by artist mentors and youth.” This sentiment suggests that as youth are challenged and supported by their mentors they also share equal power. The democratic nature of this form of mentorship values and promotes youth agency, participation and interdependence; equity is paramount and youth citizenship is cultivated as a result.

Community-based youth arts programs are arts learning environments where youth participants develop as learners and as artists. When mentorship is at the core of these programs, a democratic space is created, and youth are also challenged to develop as citizens. I look specifically here at how mentorship helps youth to develop as learners, citizens and artists. For the purposes of this research, a “youth learner” is a young person who has developed a love for the process of learning, one who is curious and inquisitive. A “youth citizen” is a young person who actively participates in his/her community. A “youth

artist” is a young person who values and works to develop his or her creative practice. These identities often co-exist within a young person and can simultaneously develop through meaningful learning experiences and key relationships. Mentors often play these key roles and help facilitate transformative experiences in which youth grow and evolve on multiple levels.

Methods of Research

In my efforts to obtain descriptive accounts of the nature of mentorship at NUA, I focused my attention on participant observations, on-site interviews, and literature published by New Urban Arts both in print and electronic form. I visited the organization twice. In each of these four to five hour visits I observed youth interacting with one another, with artist mentors and with their artwork. As part of these visits I conducted a total of eight interviews: five with current students ranging in age from 16-18, one with a program staff person, and two with artist mentors. I chose not to record the interviews for practical reasons and to convey respect. The NUA space tended to be loud and I was concerned that recording equipment would capture much of this ambient noise, making the conversations difficult to decipher. In addition, as a visitor to the NUA space, I was sensitive to the fact that I was an outsider in this community. There were students who preferred not to be interviewed; with those who agreed to speak with me, I felt that placing a microphone between us would load our interactions unnecessarily. During each interview I took copious field notes and in some cases read portions of what I had written back to the interviewee to make certain that I’d quoted him/her correctly. As is customary in research,

I use pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of my participants.¹ Interview questions attempted to address a range of topics so that I could gain a sense of youth/adult relationships, both within the organization as a whole and between individuals.

Since one objective was to provide solid descriptive accounts of the mentor/mentee relationship, one criterion when interviewing youth was that they be capable of providing such accounts. At the time of my visits, NUA programming was just beginning for the new school year, so I was careful to interview youth who had previous experience with NUA's program and its artist mentors. In my interviews with youth, I explored the concept of mentorship within the frame of "relationships with artist mentors." I felt that "mentorship" was too formal a word so instead asked questions like: "Can you tell me a story or give me an example of a particularly memorable time or moment you experienced with an artist mentor – something that stands out to you?"

In my conversations with adults at NUA, it became clear that each of the staff members acts as an informal mentor to the youth as well as to the artist mentors. The staff person and one of the artist mentors I interviewed had grown up as youth in NUA's program. In our conversations I asked them to reflect on both their experiences as youth at NUA as well as their current roles. The other artist mentor I interviewed had never been a youth participant at NUA but provided an interesting perspective as a relative new-comer to NUA's mentorship approach.

¹ I question this practice. Most of the youth I spoke with at NUA wanted their names to appear in my research; they wished to be acknowledged and to retain ownership of their stories. In this case, providing anonymity seemed to disempower rather than protect my participants.

As I analyzed my data, I coded for words, concepts and/or narratives that identified the youth as a learner, a citizen, and/or an artist. I recognized seven specific threads in my data which interviewees used to describe the mentor/mentee relationship at NUA. Mentorship was described as: informal, flexible, youth-centric, supportive, friend/family-like, collaborative, and as an equal partnership. I also looked for ways that youth and artist mentors described the nature of the learning process at NUA.

In addition to site-visits, I also analyzed NUA publications including its web presence and the manual for artist mentors entitled "I Became the Change at New Urban Arts." NUA's web presence includes an extensive website, blog, Flickr account and YouTube videos. I investigated these publications in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of NUA's core values and its approach to mentorship. Both my on-site visits and this exploration of key publications provided great insight into the nature of NUA mentorship and I was able to identify key components of these mentoring relationships.

Findings

Upon entering New Urban Arts I was immediately struck by the openness and transparency of the physical space. There are no doors except to the bathroom, the darkroom and the silkscreen studio. The staff of five has their desks squeezed into a tight corner but with no partitions or separated space. Youth continually wander into this corner to have a conversation or show a staff member something they are working on. There are no off-limits sections of the space, nothing that says: *you are not welcome in this area*. There are several supply areas but instead of closets and locked cabinets there are open shelves with bins bursting with art materials. Clear labels brightly announce: rubber bands, x-acto

Elena Belle White

knives, gloves, hot glue guns, yarn etc. The message is clear: *This is your space. Help yourself to what you need.*

In my conversations with youth at NUA, this message of collective ownership was echoed in mentorship interactions. Haley, a youth who has been coming to NUA for three years, stated that artist mentors are always stressing: “this is your studio – we run it for you – but this is your space.” She explained that this sentiment made her feel as if NUA was her space and that it belonged to the youth. Later, when talking about an on-going project she’s been tackling with a friend to re-design the interior of NUA’s only bathroom, Haley asserted: “You just don’t have people saying ‘NO’ here.” The equity and openness inherent in these sentiments demonstrates NUA’s commitment to a flexible, youth-centric learning environment.

Teaching and Learning, Mentor-style

The programming at NUA is fluid and loose with a focus on youth voice. Youth choose for themselves which mentor to work with and at any time a youth can decide to work with someone new. There are multiple references to this in the mentor manual; a past mentor warns new mentors not to worry if there aren’t many students in their group. “It does not mean they don’t like you. Maybe they are just unsure of who you are. So get to know them” (p. 14), the manual advises. I found that mentorship at NUA is a youth-driven process; while mentors bring many valuable contributions to the table, it is understood that the learning will be a two-way street. As a mentor in the manual writes: “I first came to the studio to share what I know about making comics. Now . . . I have a new understanding of what it means to be a creative person” (p. 10). Learning goes both ways. In *Teaching to*

Transgress, bell hooks describes an “engaged pedagogy” in which educators, not just youth, are challenged to examine the mutual process of learning and teaching. The difference between working *with* youth, and *for* youth, is striking; mentorship at NUA is partnership. Several youth told stories about mentors who provided materials and an initial idea, then inquired about the youth’s interests and goals. Youth reported that this practice of questioning and encouraging their input helped to open space for them to be co-directors of the learning process. They reported feeling comfortable working with their mentor to adjust, tweak, or redefine the plan. Jacob, the current studio manager and an NUA alumnus, gave an example of this process:

Once we had a mentor who was doing sculpture but none of the kids were interested. What they wanted to learn was fashion design. So they all got on the computers and started to learn about fashion design together. The mentor didn’t know anything more than the youth about fashion design so it was a learning process for everyone.

In the NUA mentorship model, youth clearly hold equal power and are seen as both teachers and learners. As Freire (1970) puts it, “the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialog with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (p.61). I learned through my interviews that NUA mentors are discouraged from developing lesson plans or rigid curriculum, but instead to have resources and initial ideas at the ready. In this flexible framework youth are able to take an idea and run with it, question it, or change it. When an NUA mentor abandons his/her plan in order to follow a youth’s investigative path, the youth’s learning process is honored. The elasticity inherent in NUA’s mentoring style demonstrates equal respect for everyone’s interests, goals, and investigations; it also models authentic regard for the process of learning.

As youth-directed learning is initiated, mentors help by pushing and prodding. Mentors challenge youth to take risks, try new things, and experiment. In their descriptions of the learning process at NUA, youth spoke about how learning is a hands-on process in which there are no strict rules and no proper way. "It's all about trial and error," one youth commented; he went on to express the difference between traditional learning environments and the one found at NUA. "You know how in a math book the answers are all in the back of the book? Well, here there's no cheat sheet. Here, we learn things the hard way, but it's better that way because then we know, we know it." Alejandro points out that at NUA there are no right answers; everyone's approach is valid and thus all contributions are important. In any learning environment, the dynamic between youth and adult can mean the difference between a rich and empowering learning experience, and one that is flat and stifling. New Urban Arts seeks to create an expansive, youth-driven learning environment in which the mentor and mentee engage in mutual teaching and learning; it is understood that the mentor is not the authority.

As knowledge, experience and perceptions are mutually exchanged, youth are empowered with an equal voice. These features distinguish mentorship from traditional parent-child, or teacher-student relationships. Soep and Chavez (2005) introduce the concept of "pedagogy of collegiality" to describe a similar model for youth/adult collaboration. At Youth Radio – a broadcast-training program in the San Francisco Bay Area – "relationships [between youth and adults are] distinctly reciprocal and interdependent, in obvious contrast to models based in traditional formations of transmission and acquisition" (p. 19). Both at Youth Radio and at NUA, youth offer key substantive contributions, unique understanding, personal experience, and a particular kind of access,

Elena Belle White

while mentors offer certain technical expertise, access to materials/equipment, advice, and a network of relationships. This youth-driven pedagogical model places youth curiosity and investigation at the heart of learning. In this way, collaborative mentor relationships allow young people to take ownership of their education and to develop a life-long love for learning.

Democratic Space: Youth as Citizens

Mentorship's collaborative spirit, its focus on active participation and joint decision-making, also provides a fertile, democratic landscape for youth to formulate their ideas, test their voices and practice leadership and engagement. Particularly in a society which does not value young people as true citizens but rather as individuals in-training for future citizenship (Smith, Lister, Middleton & Cox, 2005), it is critical that youth have access to inclusive spaces which more broadly define their social role. Blandy (1987) asserts that the continuation of the democratic tradition rests in the "ability of children and youth to participate in...democratic decision making" (p. 48). He also suggests that these meaningful experiences will require practice. Through my research, I found that NUA mentorship often helps youth to explore issues and create art works which engage them with the wider world.

At the time of my visits, the exhibition on display at NUA was entitled *Dear Providence: An Exhibition on Creative Correspondence and Mail Art*. The art-works were extremely diverse, ranging from playful and funky to seriously political in content. An exhibition flier (which doubled as an envelope template) explained that these projects had been part of the 2008 Summer Art Inquiry in which:

Elena Belle White

30 Providence public high school students and 6 artist mentors explored Creative Correspondence through zine-making, animation, puppetry, poetry, a pen-pal project with local artists, postcards, a War on Junk Mail, letter writing, postal experiments, DIY envelopes, making mailboxes, and many more collaborative and independent projects.

The artwork in this exhibition represented various approaches to the concept of *correspondence*. Some artwork directly addressed social or political issues. Other artwork humorously experimented to see just what could (and could not) be sent through the US Postal Service. Both the act of sending and the act of receiving correspondence emerged as critical aspects of this inquiry. Through this artistic investigation, youth were challenged to think about how correspondence happens (or fails to happen) literally and figuratively within the NUA community, the city of Providence RI, as well as within our larger society. It was clear that these civically-engaged art investigations gave youth an opportunity to expand their capacity for understanding, deepen their critical nature, and participate as citizens of a community. I found that by acknowledging and honoring a youth's awareness of and experience in the world, NUA artist mentors create a democratic space. This space is further activated when problems are posed and youth are challenged to plumb the depths of their understandings. Within the context of mentorship, youth have the opportunity to think more critically and deeply, to form opinions, to make decisions, and to experiment with their views of the world. This experience with engaged participation helps youth to be more productive members of society and empowered youth citizens.

New Urban Arts also supports formal, organizational youth leadership. STAB (Student Team Advisory Board) is NUA's youth council. This council advises the NUA staff and board of directors, assists with recruitment, represents NUA to community leaders and

supporters, and plans youth events such as the annual “lock-in.” At the beginning of each year when NUA hires a new cohort of artist mentors, the youth of STAB are instrumental in the selection process. In Haley’s description of this process she explains that “it’s really about us deciding if they are people we’d want to work with.” Consistent with their youth-focused mission, NUA as an organization honors youth participation and seeks to create democratic spaces on every level. In one story Jacob, the current studio manager, told of being a junior in high school and a youth at NUA. At the time, there were no artist mentors available to teach photography. So Jacob, who possessed photography skills, approached NUA’s program director and said: “I have a stupid idea. Why don’t I be the artist mentor for photo?” The reply came: “Why is that such a stupid idea?” So, as a junior in high school, Jacob became NUA’s youngest artist mentor. At New Urban Arts, active youth citizenship is fostered through encouraged self-governance, agency, and active participation. As youth learn to trust themselves and the validity of their contributions, they develop confidence and self-assuredness which prepares them to be citizens outside of the NUA environment.

The development of youth citizenship also happens on a smaller, more interpersonal, level. When describing the mentor relationship, each youth interviewed at NUA used the word “friendship.” As Marisa put it: “mentors are like friends, they stay late talking to you about whatever. I look up to him and know he won’t judge me, he just listens.” Through mentorship, the youth at NUA form solid meaningful connections to their immediate community. Baca (2005) emphasizes the importance of intergenerational collaboration and “getting people to connect on a human level” (p. 168). The symmetry inherent in mentorship fosters intimacy and an ability to see both mentor and mentee as

whole persons. hooks (2003) similarly asserts that a democratic educator fosters “a learning environment that values wholeness . . . [and] works to create closeness” (p. 49). She explains that only in this way can education liberate and empower. Mentorship serves to support young people through meaningful, trusting, respectful relationships rooted in equality. These partnerships support and sustain youth as they develop and evolve their identities as learners, community members and as citizens of the world.

Mentoring an Artistic Practice

As artist mentors at NUA seek to create dynamic, youth-driven learning environments grounded in democratic principles, they do so in the context of artistic practice and exploration. The arts in our culture are often seen as elite, unreachable and separate (Greene, 1995). At NUA, however, youth are encouraged to put their “imagination at the core of their understanding” (Greene, 1995, p. 140). The NUA website asserts that few Americans develop a creative practice and that “young people must develop a more active imagination, which provides the freedom to envision new possibilities for themselves and the world.” This focus on the creative practice helps youth to develop a strong sense of self, work comfortably in collaborative environments, trust their instincts and strengthen their ability to negotiate a complex world.

One youth described a situation in which her artistic practice was honored by the NUA community even though it annoyed everyone. Haley was in the process of making a video using several puppets she had created. This video involved the puppets speaking to each other in loud high-pitched voices. Haley remembers that everyone was annoyed by the noise her project demanded but she also acknowledged the respect she got. “I was

driving everyone insane with my project but no one disturbed me because I was in the middle of making something... they knew it was for my artwork.” Youth at NUA are respected as artists. Their artistic practice is their own and is continually validated. As I interviewed Albert, an artist mentor, a youth interrupted us to show Albert his drawing. After pausing to examine it, Albert replied “what do you think? Do it again if you have to.” His comment was upbeat and friendly and it affirmed the youth’s opinion of his work but also reminded him that the artistic process is a journey not a destination; there is no final ending point, no right answer. It was clear to me that, at NUA, youth own their artistic process and must direct it.

As many artists will say, building a creative practice requires that one investigate and experiment, surrender to curiosity, and experience both challenge and success. The development of a creative practice provides youth with “a site for constructing self” (Jocson, 2006, p.133), and in many ways mirrors the process of critical learning; youth are empowered and changed by their artistic journey and build their capacity on many levels. As artist mentors model their personal approach to creative practice and help youth to realize their own path, the arts become tangible and real. By developing a deeper understanding of the arts and by beginning to identify as an artist, youth join the “communit[y] of the wide awake” (Greene, 1995, p. 150). Baca (2005) describes the creative practice as an opportunity for youth to think critically, to learn from their histories and “to tell their stories in any [creative] language they speak” (p.168). The creative practice is at the core of mentoring relationships at NUA. I experienced youth embodying their (often new) self-perceptions as artists.

Conclusion

Mentorship at New Urban Arts is an art form in itself. As the manual states, NUA is not a traditional teaching/learning environment; here “roles of mentor/student are loose and different and interchangeable” (p. 14). This way of working with youth is not always intuitive. NUA’s commitment to their model of mentorship is evident in the way the role is structured and supported. Artist mentors complete a full day of orientation and training in the Fall and continue to meet monthly as a cohort. There are also two artist mentor fellows dedicated to providing resources and a foundation of support to artist mentors. The “I Became the Change at New Urban Arts” mentor manual provides an elaborately collaged, zine-like document with over 46 pages of information, inspired quotes and ideas. In addition, there are exhibitions each year which showcase mentor artwork. This focus on supporting and honoring the mentor role is itself an extension of mentorship. Organizationally, NUA has a tight, interdependent feel. Staff, mentors and youth are in the space because they are artists and because they want to support one another; this sense of shared purpose and common goals helps to create a powerful learning and artistic environment for both artist mentors and youth.

The NUA mentorship has several key components which make it a powerful, sustainable model. First, youth and mentors partner as co-learners. As compared with many traditional learning environments, this relational power dynamic is striking. The equitable, collaborative exchange between youth and mentors allows youth to gain confidence, trust their voice, and develop meaningful questions, ideas and goals. Youth voice is central to NUA programming; as the manual states, “Young People Prevail” (p. 7).

NUA's unique learning environment helps youth become curious investigators, expansive thinkers, and lovers of the learning process.

As mentors learn from youth and youth from mentors, there is an inherent valuing of youth participation and input. Creation of a democratic space is the second key component of the NUA mentorship model. Art investigations often challenge youth to think critically about their wider community. In addition to this artistic engagement, NUA implements formal youth leadership structures to facilitate youth-governance. As we heard from one youth, the studio belongs to youth – the staff merely run it. Finally, the close authentic connections formed between youth and mentors foster youth citizenship on an interpersonal level. These meaningful, trusting, symmetrical relationships allow youth to see others, and to be seen, as whole persons. The democratic space created by NUA mentors honors youth critical thinking, leadership, and friendship; at NUA, youth are far from *partial-citizens*.

Finally, NUA mentors model and affirm the importance of creative practice. NUA's website acknowledges that most in our society do not develop a creative practice; instead we are sorted into the few who are creative and the many who are not. NUA asserts that the arts are intrinsically valuable, and that providing a space for youth to develop their imagination and refine their creative practice is critical. "All young people – no matter their place in society – are entitled to become more creative, independent thinkers." (http://www.newurbanarts.org/basics_theory.html). At NUA, mentors embody this philosophy. As practicing artists, they model what it is to be a functioning adult artist and arrive at NUA each day ready to artistically explore alongside youth. Artistic voice is respected at NUA and mentors continually affirm the youths' ability to create.

In a world that views teachers as authorities, youth as partial-citizens, and the arts as marginal, this research demonstrates that effective mentorship can be used as a tool to combat these unhelpful traditional roles. As youth-workers and educators consider how best to support the youth with whom they work, close consideration of youth/adult relationships is key. NUA's collaborative, youth-centric, intimate, arts-focused mentorship model works to empower youth on multiple levels and as a result has powerful implications for the field of community-based youth arts. This model, however, should not be limited to the community arts; educators in schools can take important steps to honor youth voice and to reexamine the nature of youth/adult relationships. Freire writes, "[e]ducation must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (p.53). Redefining these critical roles within learning spaces would enable youth to better develop as life-long learners, thoughtful leaders, and expressive individuals. On a broader scale, as the youth/adult relationship within education was redefined, so too would be the social fabric. The level of generational fear and mistrust would diminish and adults would begin to see youth not simply as inheritors of our society but as valuable participants in it.

More research is needed to further analyze NUA's mentorship model and others like it, especially beyond the media arts, in organizations that focus on visual and writing arts. Longitudinal studies that follow both youth and mentors in their trajectory through New Urban Arts and beyond would be particularly illuminating. It would be useful, for the purposes of our society's narrow definition of success, to chart academic achievement for

Elena Belle White

the youth who attend NUA. It would be equally interesting to study NUA alums using alternative measures of success.

As a researcher, I found the timeline of this project to be limiting. In order to more thoroughly document and examine mentorship at NUA it would have been preferable to act as a participant-observer over the course of many weeks or months. In addition, attending the mentor orientation and several of the monthly mentor meetings would have engendered a deeper understanding of the support provided to artist mentors as well as the challenges they face at New Urban Arts. These additional components would have given me a richer, more intricate picture of mentorship at NUA. Nonetheless, given the scope of this project, these insights still provide a useful point of entry to investigate and analyze the nature of mentorship at NUA.

At the core of this investigation is the belief that youth are valuable members of our society. It is up to adults – those traditionally in power – to lead the way to a redefinition of youth/adult relationships. New Urban Arts seeks to create such a space and should, therefore, be emulated.

Bibliography

- Baca, J. (2005). The human story at the intersection of ethics, aesthetics and social justice. *Journal of Moral Education*, 34(2) 153-169.
- Blandy, D.E (1987). Art, social action, and the preparation of democratic citizens. In Blandy, D.E., & Congson, K. G. (Eds.), *Art in a democracy* (pp.47-57). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Camino, L. A. (2000). Youth-adult partnerships: Entering new territory in community work and research. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4, 11-20.
- Duckworth, E. R. (2006). *"The having of wonderful ideas" and other essays on teaching and learning* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum, New York.
- Goodman, S. (2003). Cameras and guns in the street. Teaching critical literacy in the documentary workshop. *Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production, and Social Change*. (pp.37-60). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (1991). Texts and margins. *Harvard Educational Review*, 61(1), 27-39.
- Heath, S., and Roach, A. A. (1999). Imaginative actuality: Learning in the arts during the nonschool hours. In E. B. Fiske, Arts Education Partnership (U.S.), United States. President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, General Electric Foundation, & John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning* (pp. 19-34). Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership: President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.
- Jocson, K. (2006). 'The best of both worlds': Youth poetry as social critique and form of empowerment. In Noguera, P., Ginwright, S.A. & Cammarota, J. (Eds.), *Beyond Resistance! : youth activism and community change: new democratic possibilities for practice and policy for American's youth* (pp.129-147). New York: Routledge.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. New York: Basic Books

Elena Belle White

New Urban Arts. (n.d) Retrieved September 28, 2008, from
http://www.newurbanarts.org/basics_programs.html

New Urban Arts. (n.d) Retrieved September 28, 2008, from
http://www.newurbanarts.org/basics_theory.html

Smith, N., Lister, R., Middleton, S., & Cox, L. (2005). Young people as real citizens: Towards an inclusionary understanding of citizenship. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(4), 425-443.

Soep, E. & Chavez, V., (2005). Youth radio and the pedagogy of collegiality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(4), 409-434.

Soep, E. (2006a). Youth mediate democracy. *National Civic Review* [Spring 2006], p. 34-40.

Soep, E. (2006b). Youth media citizenship: Beyond "Youth Voice". *Afterschool Matters*, 5, 1-11.

Appendix 1

Questions asked of New Urban Arts Youth:

1. How long have you been coming to NUA?
2. How would you describe your relationship to the NUA artist mentors?
3. What has been positive about this relationship? What has been challenging?
4. What sorts of things do you learn from the artist mentors?
5. Describe the ways you learn things here. Is the learning process different here than in other places like in school or at home?
6. How are the artist mentors like or unlike other adults you encounter in other places like school or home?
7. Could you tell me story or give me an example of a particularly memorable time or moment with your artist mentor – something that stands out to you?
8. Would you ever want to be an artist mentor at NUA? Why/Why not? Is there anything I've missed that you think I should know about NUA mentorship?
9. Is there anything I've missed that you think I should know about the mentor/mentee relationship at NUA?
Do you have any questions for me; is there anything you'd like to know about this project?

Questions asked of New Urban Arts Artists Mentors/Staff:

1. How long have you been working at NUA? Were you a youth in the program in the past?
2. How would you describe the relationship between NUA youth and artist mentors?
3. What has been positive for you about this relationship? What has been challenging?
4. Do you learn from NUA youth? If so what?
5. Describe how learning happens at NUA. Is the learning process different here than in other places like in school or at home?
6. How are the youth here like or unlike other youth you encounter in other environments?
7. Could you tell me story or give me an example of a particularly memorable time or moment with a NUA youth – something that stands out to you?
8. Is there anything I've missed that you think I should know about NUA mentorship?
9. Do you have any questions for me; is there anything you'd like to know about this project?

Elena Belle White

Appendix 2

**S-310M Creative Empowerment:
Engaging Youth in Community Through the Arts
Research Participant Permission Form**

Dear _____:

I am a student in a course at Harvard University Graduate School of Education that focuses on out of school youth arts education. As part of my required coursework, I am writing a paper on the nature of mentorship and community in community-based youth arts organizations. Your participation in this research makes a valuable contribution to my work.

Signing this form indicates that you agree to participate in my study and give me permission to interview, observe, or otherwise collect information from you for the purpose of writing this paper. The information will be kept confidential, with your name removed (a pseudonym will be assigned). In certain situations I may ask to use a tape recorder, camera and/or video tape in order to insure accuracy. All audiotapes, images and/or videotapes will be erased at your request.

I would like to assure you that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, and you may stop the interview or observation at any point. I will be happy to respond to questions or concerns regarding this project at any time. Please contact me by phone: 626-379-8440 or by e-mail: ebw536@mail.harvard.edu.

If you have questions about the course or the research paper assignment, please contact the instructors, Radhika Rao (rrnr069@mail.harvard.edu) or Marit Dewhurst (mcd606@mail.harvard.edu).

Please sign this permission form to show that you are voluntarily consenting to be a participant in my research. If you are under 18 I will ask to explain the research to a parent or guardian and request his/her signature.

Thank you, Elena Belle White

I, _____ (**participant's name**), give permission to Elena Belle White to interview or observe me for her course research paper.

(participant's signature and date)

* * * * *

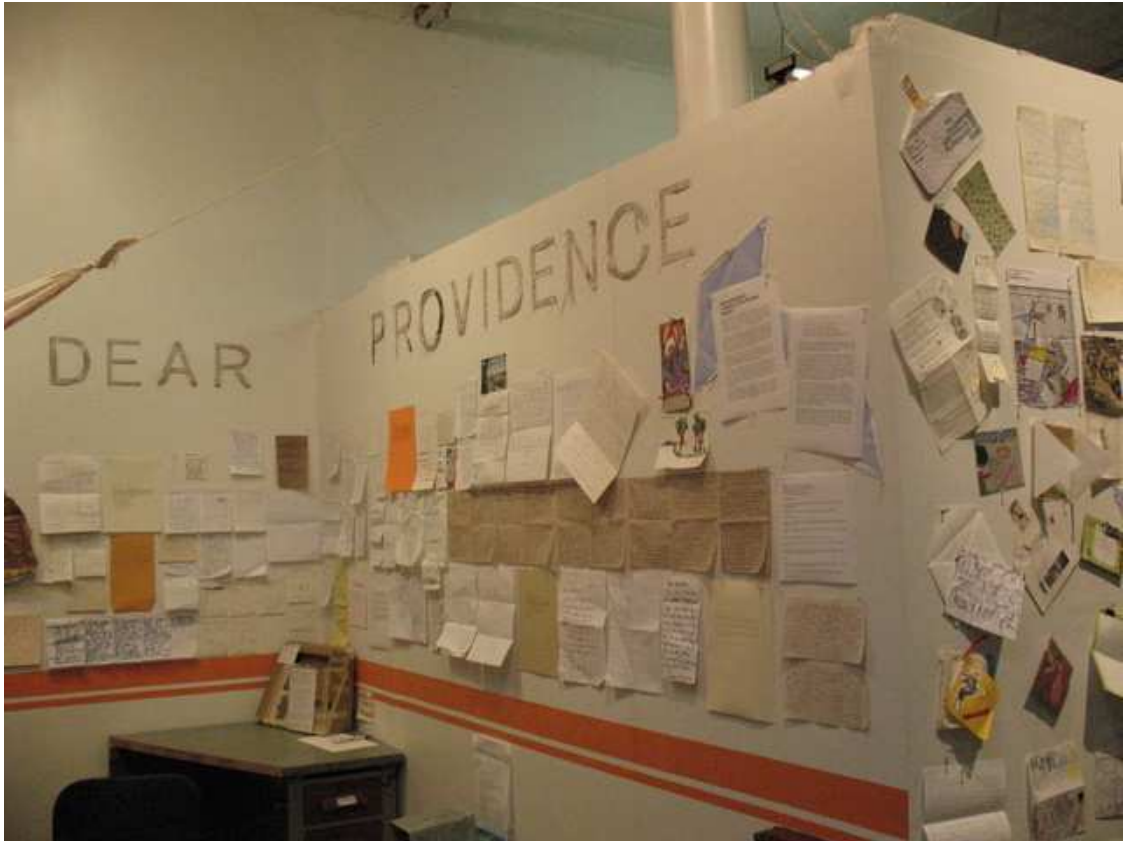
If participant is under 18, parent/guardian signature required:

I, _____ (**participant's parent/guardian name**) give permission for
_____ (**participant's name**) to be interviewed or observed by Elena Belle White
for her course research paper.

(participant's guardian's signature and date)

Appendix 3

Dear Providence: An Exhibition on Creative Correspondence and Mail Art



Dear Providence: A Public Letter Writing Project



Pen-pal Project



Mail Time

Elena Belle White



Zines



Postcard Ritual

Elena Belle White



3D Letters



Personal Mailboxes